

## **Education Cabinet**

# **Use precautions to prevent Noise Induced Hearing Loss**

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FRANKFORT, KY – Sounds of lawn mowers, weed trimmers and garden tractors signal spring's arrival but those tools also expose thousands of Kentuckians to some of the leading causes of Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL).

Whether occurring from conditions at work, home or leisure activities, more than 30 million Americans are exposed to unsafe sound levels daily that could result in NIHL.

Several causes of NIHL exist, including continuous exposure to loud noises for a prolonged period of time, such as a power saw or leaf blower, or a one-time exposure to an intense "impulse" sound, such as an explosion.

The intensity of sound is measured in units called decibels. The formula for computing decibels is factored on a power of 10, meaning a 90 decibel sound is 100 times more powerful than a 70 decibel sound. In everyday situations, normal conversation is approximately 60 decibels, the humming of a refrigerator is 40 decibels, and heavy city traffic noise can be 85 decibels. A running lawn mower carries a decibel level of 90, while a leaf blower carries a decibel level of 75 from as far away as 50 feet and 100-110 at its source.

"Failure to protect your hearing from common items such as lawn mowers and leaf blowers can cause long-term damage to your hearing," said Ingrid Edwards, MS CCC-A, audiologist at Heuser Hearing Institute. "Many lawn mowers, leaf blowers and similar items have noise ratings posted on the packaging to help the consumer know if they need hearing protection and how much is necessary for safe use. Regardless of posted information, the safest and smartest way to use equipment of any kind, whether occupational or recreational, is with hearing protection."

As part of Better Speech and Hearing Month throughout May, the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing encourages caution, including wearing ear plugs, when working around loud machinery for a prolonged period of time. If sounds that were once easily heard are becoming more difficult to decipher, a hearing screening by a licensed audiologist could detect if something is damaged and to what extent. If signs of hearing loss are detected early enough, lifestyle changes may be made to curtail further damage resulting from prolonged exposure to dangerous noise levels.

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The Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has spent more than a quarter century providing effective and efficient leadership, education, advocacy and programs to eliminate barriers and to meet the social, economic, cultural and intellectual needs of deaf and hard of hearing Kentuckians. For more information, contact:

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